

A note on the “Different Roles performed by *Agni* in *Suryaa*’s Bridal”

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The hymn **Rv-10.85** is the one of the most debated hymns of the **Mandala-10** of **Rigved** and popularly known as **Suryaa’s/Sūryā’s (सूर्या) Bridal Hymn** or the **Wedding Hymn**. The hymn describes **Vivaha** of **Suryaa (सूर्या)** the Divine but invisible character described in the verses of the Early and Late Mandalas of **Rigved** with the celestial body **Moon** or **Soma**.

Even though the hymn **Rv-10.85** revolves around the marriage of the divine character **Suryaa (सूर्या)** commonly identified as the **daughter of the Sun** god but apart from the main character **सूर्या**, the Poet has included other Deities like Indra, Adityas (including Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna), Purandhi, Soma/Moon, Surya/Sun, Earth, Heaven, Asvins, Pushan, Soma (juice), Savitar, Agni, Mataraisvan, Waters, etc. in different verses of the hymn. Additionally, references of the human characters like Raibhi, Narasamshi, Visvavasu (Gandhara), Brahmana, the in-laws/ family members of the husband of the newly married bride, four footed animals etc. are also present. But out of these entities, god **Agni** is the most distinguished character as that plays distinct roles on different occasions during the wedding ceremony of **Suryaa/सूर्या**. Hence in the present note, the diverse acts of the character **Agni** has been discussed in detail.

Rigvedic Composers have identified two distinct forms of **Land-based Agni/fire**.

1. Household Agni – also known as **Grihapati** or Master of the house as in those days, in every house, food was cooked by burning the firewood. Additionally, **Agni** was regularly lit in night to obtain heat and light and also used as a weapon to keep away the wild animals/enemies.

2. Agni of Yajna- It is different from the normal household **Agni** and has its origin in the wildfires that occur naturally in the dense forests. The **Mandala-3** Poet in the verse **Rv-3.9,5** has pointed out that **Matarisvan** (means wild **wind**) brought **Agni of Yajna** to them [1].

Rv-3.9,5: Him wandering at his own free will, **Agni** here hidden from our view,

Him **Matarisvan** brought to us from far away produced by friction, from the Gods.

From the content of the above verse, it is crystal clear that **Agni of Yajna** (also called as the **Sacred Fire** or **Sacrifice**) is a small scale duplication of the wildfires that frequently cause a large scale destruction of the living things like plants, animals, birds, human beings etc. Please note that **Yajna** ritual was introduced by the ancestors of Rigvedic Poets after the shaping of new warrior god **Indra**. The various acts performed by **Agni** before and during the actual wedding function of **Suryaa/ सूर्या** have been illustrated in the following paragraphs.

A. *Agni* as the *Guardian* of *Suryaa* (सूर्या):

Following verses manifest that in addition to **Soma** and **Gandharva**, during the late childhood phase of **Suryaa**, **Agni** too becomes the **Guardian** or the **Care taker** who can be seen as the trainer teaching the daughter of god Sun how to cook food using firewood.

Rv-10.85,40: सोमं प्रथमो विविदे गन्धर्वो विविदु उत्तरः । तृतीयो अग्निष्टे पतिस्तुरीयस्ते मनुष्यजाः ॥४०॥

somaḥ prathamō vivide gandharvo vivida uttarah | tṛtīyo agniste patisturīyaste manuṣyajāḥ //

Rv-10.85,41: सोमो ददद्गन्धर्वाय गन्धर्वो दददुग्रये । रयिं च पुत्रांश्चादादुग्रिमह्यमथो इमाम् ॥४१॥

somo dadad gandharvāya gandharvo dadadagnaye /

rayiṁ caputrāṁścādādagnirmahyamatho imām //

In other words, in absence of her mother, **Suryaa** first learns to survive on the drink **Soma**, then learns basics of arts/singing and how to do house chores from **Gandharva**, and then takes the lessons from **Agni** about cooking using fire. In this way, one after another, these three entities look after **Suryaa** from her birth to the stage of grown up girl and after her marriage she would become actual wife of a character (forth one in her life) of her choice.

B. *Agni* as the *Torch Bearer* in the *Wedding Procession* of *Suryaa* (सूर्या):

In the verse given below, when the twin gods **Asvins** come to the place of **Suryaa** (**Gandharva** or the **land of Soma** on **Earth**) as the escorts to take to her to Heaven for her wedding with the **Moon/Soma**, then **Agni** acts the torch bearer or the leader as in the **night only** the **Moon/Soma** can be seen in action (properly visible). It means, **Suryaa** is supposed to travel in a procession to Heaven in the **darkness/night**, and hence **Agni** plays his role as the **real path-finder**.

Rv-10.85,8: स्तोमां आसन्नप्रतिधयः कुरीरुं छन्दं ओपशः । सूर्यायां अश्विनां वराऽग्निरासीत्पुरोगवः ॥८॥

stomā āsan pratidhayaḥ kurīruṁ chanda opasaḥ | sūryāyāśvinā varā agnirāsīt puroghavaḥ //

Note: It seems that the Poet has suitably planned the wedding ceremony of **Suryaa** with **Soma/Moon** in the **night time**, so that her father **God Sun** and Goddess **Usha/Dawn** would remain absent. Hence these names are not found in the verses that depict main ritual.

C. *Agni* as the *Sacred Fire* to hand over wife to husband in the Actual Ritual:

Once **Suryaa** the daughter of god **Sun** reaches the **Heaven** in a procession escorted by **Asvins** along with **Agni** as the **frontline leader** in the **dark night** to marry **Soma/Moon**, again at the time of actual ceremony, in the verse **Rv-10.85,38** the Poet requests **Agni** to act as the **Fire God** (Priest?) to perform the pious rite of handing over a wife (**Suryaa**) to her husband (**Soma/Moon**) and then bless the couple to have progeny in future (blessing similar to *Ashtaputra saubhagyawati bhava/ अष्टपुत्र सौभाग्यवती भव* | generally given to married woman).

In other words, this particular part of the function is conducted in presence of the **Sacred Fire** (as the divine witness-**Agni-Sakshi**), in a holy ritual, and this religious act is very similar to present-day **Kanya-daan/ कन्यादान** takes place in presence of several invitees.

Rv-10.85,38: तुभ्यमग्रे पर्यवहन्सूर्या वंहतुनां सह । पुनः पतिभ्यो जायां दा अग्रे प्रजयां सह ॥३८॥

tubhyamaghre paryavahan sūryām vahatunā saha |

punaḥpatibhyo jāyām dā agne prajāyā saha ||

D. *Agni* as the *Protector* and the *Long Life Bestower* to the husband and wife:

The Poet in the next verse **Rv-10.85,39** makes it further clear that **Agni**, in presence of gathering, once again gives responsibility of the wife (**Suryaa**) to her husband (**Soma/Moon**) and then assures **Suryaa** that her husband **Soma** to have ever lasting brilliance and the longer life (this may due to the fact that with the passing of days, the **celestial body** loses its shine and also shrinks in size from the **Full Moon** to **New Moon** phase). Additionally, on behalf of **Agni**, the Composer guarantees **Suryaa** that her husband would see **hundred autumns**.

It means to say that the Poet tells **Suryaa** not to worry about the short span of life of her husband **Soma/Moon** as in presence of all guests, God **Agni** has given assurance of his longer life. Here **Agni** is presented as the **Well-wisher of the newly married Couple**.

Rv-10.85,39: पुनः पत्नीमग्निरंदादायुषा सह वर्चसा । दीर्घायुरस्या यः पतिर्जीवाति शरदः शतम् ॥३९॥

punaḥ patnīmagniradādāyusā saha varcasā | dīrghāyurasyā yaḥ patirjīvāti śaradaḥ śatam ||

E. Reference: “Rig Veda” (Bilingual), Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896) in PDF

(Also see Appendix “A”)

Appendix “A”

Comparison of “Suryaa’s Wedding” with the present-day Hindu Marriage

Mythical story of **Suryaa’s bridal** provides a stage to do comparison of the marriage procedure followed during the **Vedic Period** with the current-day **Hindu wedding** that takes place in India. Two key points are discussed here.

1. Marriage Procession and Lighting: As per the verse **RV-10.85,8**; **Suryaa** the **Bride** and the daughter of the god **Sun** proceeds in a **procession** in the night to marry **Soma/Moon** in **Heaven** with **Asvins** as the escorts and **Agni** as the path finder. Present-day Hindu marriage that are held in the evening or night, it is generally seen that the **Groom** comes in a procession (and not Bride) with the battery operated lighting system to the pre-decided place (marriage hall). About 30 years back, in the night procession of a Groom belonging to well to do family, **Petro-max** (pressurised paraffin or kerosene lamps) lamps were used as the decorative lights.

2. Role of Agni in the actual ceremony: As discussed earlier in the present note, the Poet has composed the verses **Rv-10.85,38** and **39** in such a way that as if **Agni**, the **Sacred Fire** present in the marriage function as the performer (the **Master of ceremony**) tells the groom to take a pledge to look after his bride for the entire life, and both would remain faithful to each other. In other words, in presence of the most august gathering, **Agni** the **Priest** as if declares that now onwards, **Soma** and **Suryaa** are bound by the **Sacred Bond**, can live happily together to produce progeny and also wishes them to have a very long married life.

In the Hindu wedding function of today, first a sacred fire is lit in the **Havana-kund**, and then the bride and groom perform **Sapta-padi** ritual that actually refers to the couple walks seven steps together, or go seven rounds around the sacred fire, around which the sacred and religious ritual is performed. In other words, in India, since Vedic time, **Agni**, the **holy fire** bears the witness to seven vows taken by the newlywed couple.

Especially in **Maharashtra**, on the next day of the actual marriage event, in the groom’s place, **Satya-Narayana Puja** is organized wherein a small scale **Homa/Havana** is conducted for the betterment of newly wedded couple, and the senior members present among the guests bless the married couple to get offspring (in olden days, some aged persons used to say to the bride to have eight sons or **अष्टपुत्र सौभाग्यवती भव** 1), longer life and give them their best wishes to earn the name and fame together in their married life.